

THE *Final Straw*

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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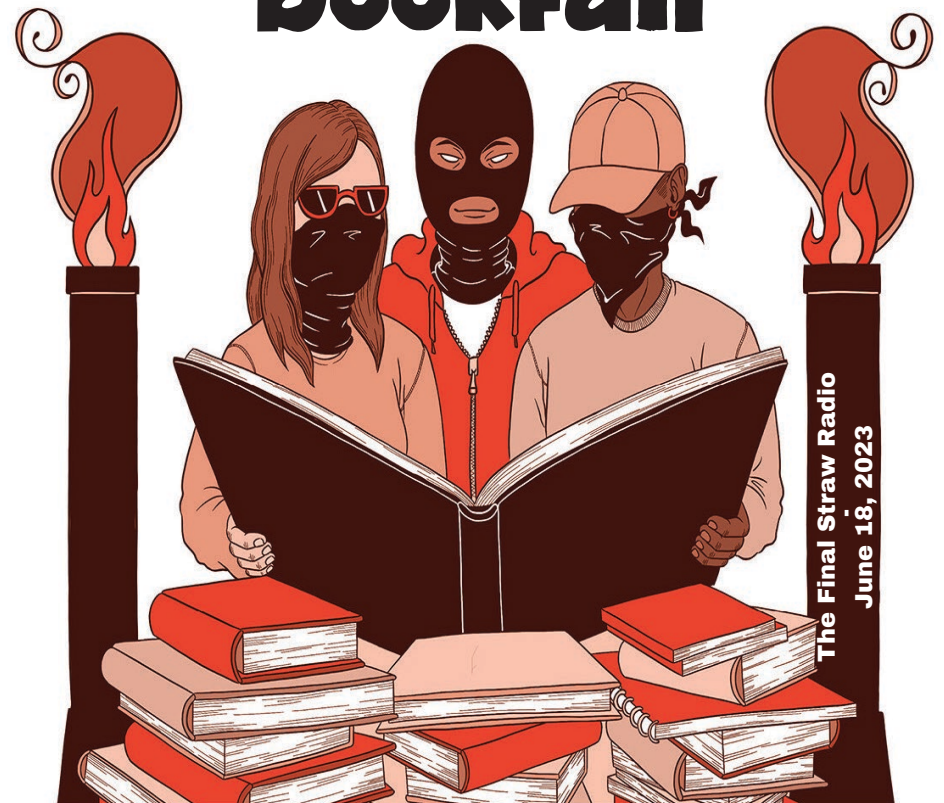
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updates on stop cop city and the balkan anarchist bookfair



The Final Straw Radio
June 18, 2023

This week, we're sharing an interview with Matthew Scott, a journalist with ACPC in Atlanta to talk about recent developments with the struggle against Cop City, the building of a giant police training facility with a simulated cityscape for urban counter insurgency training for law enforcement from around the USA & around the world in a forest in Atlanta, Georgia. You can read Matthews work at **ATLPRESSCOLLECTIVE.COM**.

We review the development of the project and the organizing against it, touch on the current situation for the 41 people facing domestic terrorism charges from the state of Georgia, talk about the SWAT raid and financial crime charges against the Atlanta Solidarity bail fund, the vote by city council to move forward with tens of millions of dollars of funding despite 15 hours of public comment against and take a look at where the project is now that clearcutting has happened.

We also share a segment by A-Radio Berlin from the May 2023 episode of Bad News about the upcoming Balkan Anarchist Bookfair and the St-Imier 2023 anarchist and anti-authoritarian gathering.

Balkan Anarchist Bookfair: <http://bab2023.avtonomija.org/> or bab2023.espivblogs.net
Atlanta Press Collective: **ATLPRESSCOLLECTIVE.COM**

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Regarding the logistics, as we are expecting a lot of people, a lot of comrades coming to the book fair, many hundreds maybe even, this will be a big logistical challenge for the organizational team, especially in the sense to arrange free accommodation for everybody that is coming or for everybody that would need to have a free accommodation in Ljubljana. But we are optimistic. We are putting a lot of effort also in this way, and we think that it will be possible to host all the people in our communal spaces, in social centers, in squats, in other communal spaces, but also a lot in flats and houses of our comrades and supporters. Generally, we are asking people who can afford to try to arrange the accommodation by themselves, but this is just for those who can do this. Otherwise, contact us through email and we will find a solution. All other things at the book fair will be organized following the anarchist principles of anti-authoritarian self-organization. So there will be a lot of space where comrades come to the book fair and can actively get involved with all the help that will be needed from technical infrastructure, food, and other tasks. And of course, also in a sense of content, of organization of the event itself, its discussions, its activities, organizational meetings, and beyond that. So just a big invitation to everybody. We think it will be a big, strong, important gathering. We hope to get positive results afterward that can be used for our future struggles.

or specifically to the Saint-Imier anarchist gathering, I think there are some specifics. The Balkans, especially with the experience of former socialist Yugoslavia, with the wars of the 90s, and with a totally different history of Turkey, for instance, in the south-east of the Balkans, I think there are some differences and some good contents that the movement from the Balkans can bring to the movement of the other parts of Europe. Two of these contents are the consistent anti-nationalism that the movement is developing throughout the years, which was always a very important point also at the political level of the Balkan Anarchist Network and Balkan Anarchist Bookfair as an event.

Obviously, this is because of the horrible, horrific experience of the Yugoslav Wars in the 90s, where we saw how nationalism was used by the political and economic elites to divide people and create gains for themselves. Another thing is connected with this topic and which is also very much discussed in the Balkan Anarchists Network, and part of the content of all of the book fairs is an anti-militarist perspective. It is also connected with the experience of the Yugoslav Wars in the 90s on one level, and also on another level, for instance, the experience of the Greek state, of the movement there with the connection with NATO and American armies. So anti-militarist perspective is a very strong perspective, and I think that was articulated or discussed or practiced in a little bit different way. For instance, when talking about the war in Ukraine, Balkan Anarchist Bookfair was articulating the question about it already in 2014 at the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair that was held in Mostar. Mostar is a Bosnian city that was totally divided by two nationalities and destroyed by the war, and we thought it was a very good symbolic point to express explicit consistent anti-nationalist and anti-militarist perspectives at this book fair. So I hope the people from the West or from the East will listen to the articulations about war nationalism from the Balkan anarchists because we have some important points to share.

H: Okay, as a last question, could you tell us where people can find more information about the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair online and how they can reach you if they have questions or proposals? And secondly, could you very shortly tell us about the logistics that people need to know if they are coming to Ljubljana: accommodation, food, or whatever?

P: You can find all the information about the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair 2023 in Ljubljana at our website bab2023.espivblogs.net or bab2023.avtonomija.org. There you will find all the information you need. We are updating the site regularly. So I think everything you need to know is there, all the information, also the contact that you can use for announcing your participation or sharing your proposals or questions. The email is bab2023@riseup.net. You can get some of the information also at the info events we are doing as part of the promotion of the event in different parts of Europe. Info events are also listed on the website. And this is more or less all you need to know.

stop cop city

Matt: My name is Matt Scott. I am a journalist with the Atlanta Community Press Collective. I'm based in Atlanta, GA. My preferred pronouns are either he or they, either one works interchangeably.

TFSR: And could you tell us a little bit about Atlanta Community Press Collective, ACPC, which I'm probably going to be using from now on? How did it start, how it works, and who works there?

M: ACPC is definitely the easier way of referring to it. ACPC was founded in the fallout or the after period of the 2021 City Council vote to approve the Cop City lease. So it's been around for about the same time as the Cop City Project, or the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center Project, as it is officially known. Cop City is its unofficial name. And I'm sure we'll get into that a little later here. But it is an abolitionist, not-for-profit media platform built by community members. So I was not one of the founders. I've been a part of ACPC since late April, or early May of last year, officially. And over that time, ACPC first came on the scene with an exhaustive history of the area in which this project is supposed to be built. It was known as the old Atlanta prison farm. And then once I joined, I started to write articles about things that were happening as they were happening. And we transitioned into more of a journalism outlet and have begun bringing on more people. At this point, we are about seven individuals who are either volunteers, or there's myself, a full-time staff member, and part-time staff members as well. We are looking to continue to expand.

TFSR: You mentioned that ACPC started up in conjunction with a part of the movement to Stop Cop City. Is ACPC a part of that movement? Is it alongside that movement? What's its relationship with that?

M: We are movement-aligned. We are not part of the movement. There's definitely a separation, very intentionally. We are not the mouthpiece of the movement. We do take the work of journalism very seriously, and so we acknowledge that we have definitely a position, and we are coming at this from an abolitionist perspective where we don't want to see Cop City built, but we operate outside of the movement to retain that independence and that separation where we are doing journalistic work without being compromised.

TFSR: Cool. For listeners who somehow haven't heard or maybe heard the wrong thing, can you give a brief rundown of the struggle against Cop

City? What Cop City is itself and the resistance that people have been putting up against its construction? I know there's a lot of history right there.

M: Yes. So Cop City is a \$90-million public safety training center that is set to be built in an area of Atlanta called the South River Forest. This is the largest contiguous piece of forested land in Atlanta. It's one of the largest internal city forested land pieces in the entire country. And it is known as one of the four lungs of Atlanta. Essentially, for the neighborhoods around the Cop City, it's where flood protection takes place. Obviously, it has a cooling effect. And of course, it has a carbon capture effect. So this is a very important piece of forested land that is also attached to a river. It's called the South River. And there's a creek, Entrenchment Creek, that runs from this area of the forest into the South River, which is one of the endangered waterways. So there are a lot of environmental concerns all around this project, in addition to the concerns about police militarization. So this is called Cop City because part of this facility will be essentially a police tactical training section that imitates real life. So, at this point, there's scheduled to be built basically a city block with a gas station, a nightclub, apartments, and a house that police can use to simulate real-life events. They would argue that it's to simulate active shooter events. More often than active shooter events, police are used to put down protest events and that is also where this would be practiced. So that is how the Cop City name came about.

The project started all the way back in 2016 but fell off until 2021, when it was brought about again by the Atlanta Police Foundation, where they said that it will be built in this area of land. And they pitched it to the City Council and City Council approved, and there was a lot of public debate about the project, but a lot of the debate in front of the City Council was controlled. There were 17 hours of public comment. That was during the height of the COVID era, so City Council was meeting remotely. So 17 hours of virtual public comment, 70% of it was against passing this lease to build the facility. After the passage of the lease, people began to occupy the land. They became known as forest defenders. Towards the end of 2021, about December of 2021, they set up a permanent encampment that was broken down by police about a month later. So from January 2022, all the way until January 2023, there was a permanent encampment. There were several sites throughout the forest where people were actively holding down the land, building tree-sits, to stop the facility from being constructed, to stop engineers from being able to come onto the site and lay down planning stakes, and things like that. So they very effectively did halt construction for a significant period of time.

In December of 2022, police had a raid where they arrested six people and charged them with domestic terrorism charges. And then in January of 2023, there was another raid where they arrested seven people, and they killed a protester. And this is what is recognized, probably unfairly, as the first police killing of an environmental protester in the United States. It's the first one that's recorded as such, but of course, police have likely killed protesters, maybe not as connected with a

philosophical groupings or reading circles or whatever to address them in a serious way. This is our principle. To do this, we have to invite all parts of the anarchist movement to the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair. And we tried to do this, and we sent hundreds of personal concrete emails to different groups, organizations, collectives, people from all parts of the world actually and from different kinds of anarchist tendencies. So we understand this space.

The Balkan Anarchist Bookfair is an open space for the whole anarchist movement and a space where we can discuss important questions together. In a sense of how we will try to do this in practice with the program of the book fair, one of the ideas is to have not so much smaller presentations that are organized by specific groups on specific topics but to have more broad topics that are organized in a cluster format, which would mean that people from different perspectives, from different groups, organizations, and geographies can speak together on one topic. So cluster discussions will be one of the formats with which we try to address this agenda. And the other one will be organizational meetings. We hope that for a lot of content of the book fair, there will follow also some of the organizational efforts, in a sense of networking, in a sense of writing statements, publishing proposals after the book fair, and hopefully also already preparing some of the activities for the future.

H: Yes, that sounds good. The next question is about the anarchist movement in the Balkans. Is there such a thing? And if there is, what do you think, based on their history, based on their own experiences with practice and theory, they can bring? What are the strong points and the important topics that they can bring to Saint-Imier later on?

P: I definitely think that there is such a thing as anarchist movement in the Balkans, and the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair is just one of the expressions of this movement and also one of the tools connecting this movement. Obviously, the movement is developed in different regions on different levels. But there is a strong wish to create a common network. And we also understand the book fair as a way to do this. For instance, in the past, we put a lot of effort into supporting the small movements in countries like Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with the organization of the book fair, they somehow become more involved with the network. The other thing is also some of the countries like Turkey, for instance, with which we don't have a lot of connections, although there is a strong movement present. And we try to also connect the movement to our network.

This year, we also put a lot of effort into bringing people that are usually not participating in the book fairs people, like from Istanbul will be coming from three different groups. There will be people from Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, so we were successful in this way. And we hope that it will be the next step to creating these contacts and networks for the future. Regarding content the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair can bring to the international anarchist movement

border of the Balkans, but it also borders central and west Europe. So it is a space where people from different parts of Europe and the world can easily meet. So this was also one of the thoughts. Generally in a political sense, we think it is important to connect these two meetings also because we believe that parts of Europe are not so well introduced into the Balkan anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement. There are not a lot of strong connections with the Balkans, especially with the smaller movements in some of the countries of ex-Yugoslavia and some others also. So for us it's also a big opportunity. Like the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair in Ljubljana this year, it's an opportunity for people from different parts of Europe to meet, to be introduced to Balkan anarchism, to the history of Balkan anarchism, and to create connections for future cooperation, struggles, networking, and so on.

H: One of the hopes we have as an Anarchist Radio Berlin towards the Saint-Imier gathering is that it might be a place to have different parts of the anarchist movement, also not just Europe-centered, talk about how we can enact real change, how we can get away from just being a philosophy to being something practical. And in the open call of the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair, a similar wish is formulated. "We ask, are we doing enough and are we successful in building counterpower needed for real change?" And my question is how you're trying to do this within the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair. Are there specific program parts or debates you're looking for?

P: Yes, as you mentioned, we articulated very strongly in the first call for participation in the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair part of the political agenda of this meeting we are organizing in Ljubljana. In this call, we also say that for us, the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair was never only about books. It was mainly understood as a tool of the movement, the physical space where comrades from different countries can meet and have the opportunity to discuss important questions. Not only discuss important questions but also try to organize, to network, to create connections and future activities. So with all this in mind, this is the political agenda of the meeting. We went into the organization of the event itself.

Firstly, we think that at the moment, there are many problems that not just our movement, but the whole society is facing, the Ukraine war being just the most extreme example of all of these problems that we as a society are facing at this time. And we think that the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair and also the Saint-Imier meeting will be important sites where these important questions can be discussed, and where different proposals can be articulated with the hope to find some common solutions to make more concrete steps in the future towards our political agenda. So for us, one thing is clear. As anarchists in our local organization, we have a very strong principle, which we call anti-sectarianism. We think that it is very important generally, and we try to do this also in practice, to have some discussion and cooperation with all parts of the different anarchist tendencies or movements and even beyond the anarchist movement, because the questions are too big for small

particular struggle before, without the recognition. So at this point now, the opposition to the project is a pretty vast coalition, from anarchists to environmentalists to regular old soccer moms, essentially. There are preschoolers. There's an entire preschool where their curricula is dedicated to studying this forest. And the indigenous name, the Muskogee Creek, for it is the Weelaunee Forest, so we use that interchangeably. Their curricula is studying the Weelaunee Forest. And now with a referendum campaign that just launched, that coalition continues to grow. It's expanded into more electorally-minded orgs. And throughout the last year, we've seen just this constant expansion in the umbrella that is the Stop Cop City movement.

TFSR: Cool. Thanks for that summary. The last time that the show featured an interview concerning the Atlanta Forest Defense, it was immediately after the murder of Manuel "Tortuguita" Terán by police. And you make a very good point that this is listed as the first killing by police of someone involved directly in an environmental movement in the US. And there are so many instances where, because of ecological defense work often being so distinguished geographically from cities or from a lot of witnesses, there is no way to prove to make that claim, right? There's tons of times when this could have happened without witnesses or without the amount of media attention that it's gotten. A number of police claims from that time have been proven false by the independent autopsy and continuing media investigation and popular pressure. For instance, the officer who possibly shot himself, but the police were... I'm not sure if it was the Georgia State Bureau of Investigation or the Atlanta Police or the Troopers or who was making the claim that this cop was shot by Tortuguita and that this was an act of self-defense by the cop, but that's just one of the things... The morning meditation position that it was found that Tortuguita was probably in when they were shot... I was wondering if you are aware of anything leading to charges against the Atlanta Police or any response from official institutions to this new evidence coming up or challenges to their claims.

M: There is currently a lawsuit against the Atlanta Police Department for withholding information from the family of Manuel Paez Terán, or Tort as I will call them. That is a lawsuit just for the withholding of documents so that the family can learn what happened. There is a Georgia Bureau of Investigation investigation that happened around this. So Georgia State Patrol is the police unit that killed Tortuguita, and a Georgia State Patrolman was the officer who was allegedly shot by Tortuguita. So if there are any state charges, they would be levied against Georgia State Patrol, those Georgia State Patrol officers. That investigation from GBI was turned over to a district attorney in North GA, and there's not been an update on the case since it was turned over. I believe it was sometime in late April, maybe early May, when the case was turned over. So we haven't heard an update on that.

As far as civil actions against the police, I would imagine that the investigation, the family's investigation into the killing of Tortugueta, will probably lead at some point to some civil action against Georgia State Patrol. But as far as any other litigation against Atlanta police for the killing of Tortugueta, I don't think that there would be any. And it is through body camera footage from the Atlanta Police Department, from one of their special teams. The team is called APEX. It's similar to the SCORPION team that killed Tyre Nichols. Their body cam footage had one of their officers say, "You shot your own guy", essentially, talking about the officer who was injured during that raid. That's why this lawsuit against APD is happening because they apparently do have some information that they were withholding at the request of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

TFSR: Yeah, that's wacky. So statewide repression against the movement to stop Cop City has continued to spread, which can be seen in the recent arrest in Atlanta City by, I think, Atlanta PD with the authority of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation of three activists doing bail support with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. And these folks were initially charged with money laundering and charity fraud. Can you talk a little bit about what you know about this SWAT-style raid and where the activists are now?

M: To talk about this, we have to go to late February. In late February, there were conversations about the potential of RICO charges, Racketeering-Influenced Corrupt Organization charges against the Defend the Forest movement. And it was actually the Atlanta Solidarity Fund that opened up those conversations. They provided the evidence that these charges they believed were forthcoming. And then they had a presentation with the Civil Liberties Defense Center to explain what RICO charges were. And we're gonna hold those RICO charges in our brains as we continue on here. But they expected RICO charges to drop before the Week of Action, and then they never did. ACPC actually released documents from the Atlanta Police Foundation where they were assuring their board and contractors that indictments would be coming against forest defenders to hopefully disrupt the movement. They were setting those out in early February.

The charges never came, but through conversations or comments by prosecutors in the cases against the domestic terrorism defendants, they started to lay out this financial case and more and more indication that they were planning on doing some financial crimes charge. And a lot of these prosecutorial comments revolved around the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. At one point, a prosecutor said that the Atlanta Solidarity Fund is being investigated as at the center of this whole thing. So the Atlanta Solidarity Fund organizers were aware that this was likely to happen and had prepared some comment for it and had prepared another bail fund, this time the National Bail Network, to take over handling bail here in Atlanta in the case that these charges came down. So it was May 31st. Early in the morning, a police SWAT vehicle, an armored vehicle, and a SWAT team broke down the door

balkan anarchist bookfair

Host: So we're talking with a comrade from Ljubljana and so-called Slovenia, where the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair for its 20th anniversary will be returning to. The event will be happening from the 7th to the 9th of July. That is two weeks before the Saint-Imier gathering. Maybe before we start with the interview, could you present yourself shortly, your political background, and your involvement with the book fair?

Peter: Okay, thank you for having me. I'm Peter. I am involved with the anarchist movement in Ljubljana for many years now. I'm part of the local anarchist group that is part of the Anarchist Federation that is connecting the anarchist groups in Slovenia and parts of Croatia. I have been involved through this organization also with the Balkan Anarchist Network and with the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair as a specific project. I was actually also involved with the organization of the first book fair and the discussion that led to this project, to the initiative to create this event for the Balkan anarchist movement.

H: That's amazing. We are happy to have you here. In its first public call for the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair, the organizational assembly wrote that since the other big international anarchists gathering in Saint-Imier was happening soon after you wanted to create an organic connection between the two gatherings. Could you elaborate a bit about this idea and also how it's been translated into the practice of organizing the event?

P: Obviously, our movement and our local structures are involved with the internationalist anarchist movement. Our local organization has a few axes of international connection and organizing. Besides the Balkans is also a part of Europe. And because of that, we have on our radar for a long time already the big anniversary of the Anarchist International and the Saint-Imier meeting this summer. So when we started to organize the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair, we had this in mind. For us, it was important to somehow connect these two events, and also choose a date that would maybe facilitate participation of people in both events. But we also wanted to allow people who are coming to the Saint-Imier meeting from far away, from other continents, to use also this opportunity and come to Ljubljana for the book fair. So we decided to organize the book fair two weeks before the Saint-Imier meeting, and we tried to promote it together.

One point for us, it also may be technical or geographical, but I think it's interesting and important, Slovenia is located in specific geography. It's the north

they were the *Journal* and the *Constitution*, separate papers that were published in the morning and at night, but they didn't engage in the Vietnam War in the way that left-leaning individuals thought they should. So they started their own publication. They started with the *Great Speckled Bird*, and it became this infamous and very important media institution in the city of Atlanta. They published exposés on the mayor. Their offices were firebombed. They had this very strong impact on the media landscape in Atlanta. I would like to think that we are following in the footsteps of *The Great Speckled Bird* in that regard.

TFSR: Awesome. Where can people find more work from ACPC?

M: You can check out our website, atlprescollective.com. We also spend a lot of time really thinking through a multimodal approach to delivering the news. So our Twitter feed @atlanta_press has a lot of information that maybe isn't necessarily great for a full article, but it's still important information to have. And then our Instagram account @atlprescollective, we do deeper dives in terms of video stories.

TFSR: Cool. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to have this conversation and the work that y'all do. Thanks a lot.

M: Yeah, thanks for having me. Glad to be here.

of a house called the Tear Down. And this is a house in a gentrifying neighborhood that is an anti-gentrification house. They've lived there for I believe something like a decade at this point, maybe even a little bit longer.

Out of this house, they ran Atlantis Food Not Bombs until COVID hit. They now run another nonprofit called Food For Life that provides thousands of pounds of free food each week. They also do a cop watch program. And of course the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, the bail fund program. So a lot of things are run out of his house. Atlanta Solidarity Fund predates the Cop City movement. It goes all the way back to 2016 where it was organized in response to anti-confederate and anti-fascist demonstrations. So they were arrested early that morning in their pajamas, taken to jail. We're reading these warrants, and these warrants are alleging that they're committing charity fraud through misuse of funds. And some of those misuse of funds that are cited as examples are reimbursements for gas, reimbursements for COVID tests, reimbursements for just supplies in general, purchasing a cell phone, as would be needed when you're operating a bail fund. So the charity fraud aspects of it, and then they alleged that there was money laundering when the Atlanta Solidarity Fund sent I believe \$20,000 to another bail network, and then that bail network sent that \$20,000 back. So in order to be money laundering, there had to be a crime that was covered up or a second crime in this transfer. Instead, it was just a straight transfer from one entity to another and back. And all of this is of course trackable on the Open Collective platform. So the charges were incredibly weak. But nevertheless, prosecutors brought them forward. And when they were brought in front of a judge, even the judge was like "There's not much meat on the bones here. You're gonna have to do a lot better work if you want these charges to stick or to hold up in court." So the judge granted these organizers a \$15,000 bond, which may sound like a lot, but in Atlanta, we're now dealing with anywhere from \$300,000 to \$600,000 bonds for a lot of our defendants arrested in relation to this movement. So it was pretty small in comparison. They are now out of jail. They are not allowed to post anything on social media, which is why you probably haven't heard anything from them, as one of the stipulations of their bail conditions. They are allowed to talk to the press and talk to the media. So they have been doing that. So you might see them... one of them was on the Young Turks last week, and then they've been on national radio stations and national networks as well. But they are doing well. They knew this was coming. And of course, it's a traumatic event, but they were prepared for it.

TFSR: In the context of what you say where there was clear communication going back to February where the Police Foundation and other authorities had said to investors and such that there were arrests that were being readied that we're going to impact the ability of the movement to be able to respond to the Cop City project, it seems pretty clear that one could make the argument that there's an attempt to impose a chilling effect on what could be deemed defensible First Amendment activities. I don't know if that's

a thing that's being pursued at this point or if people are still just rolling with the punches and trying to get the project stopped before thinking about bringing extra lawsuits against authorities.

M: Yes. The chilling effect is definitely, from all appearances, the intent of this. It's unclear if prosecutors really do think that the Solidarity Fund is some financial entity that is really underpinning the movement, or if they are going after the bail fund aspect of it, especially in light of... We've got an upcoming Week of Action at the end of this month, and they might have wanted to take it out in advance of that to discourage people from engaging in First Amendment activities, without knowing that there was going to be a bail fund to back them up. But there isn't any legal action against that that I am aware of. There have been calls. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund published an open letter calling for a DOJ investigation into, in particular, these charges of money laundering and charity fraud as repressive tactics. So litigation might be forthcoming, or there might be some external investigation. A DOJ investigation was also called for by Senator Raphael Warnock. We'll see how that plays out. But it definitely does strike as an attempt to chill engagement against this project.

TFSR: You mentioned domestic terrorism charges earlier against people that were engaging in... were just found in the forest but maybe some who might have been engaging in tree-sit activities. The state of Georgia continues to slap activists with these domestic terrorism charges, despite the fact that the protests people have attended don't fall into any reasonable definition of terrorism. And as far as I'm aware, the Department of Homeland Security, the federal institution that would oversee charges of this sort, has recently reiterated that it doesn't apply the term to any domestic formations or movements, that there's no domestic terrorism charges or domestic terrorist groups that it recognizes. Are you aware of how many people are still inside, and how many are facing these kinds of charges? And for what activities?

M: Yes, so there are 42 charges of domestic terrorism across 41 people. One person was charged twice, stemming from two separate events. Of those 41 people, there are two people that are still being held. The person who has two charges just had their bail revoked from their first charge, so they are now in DeKalb County Jail after violating their bail conditions. And then a second individual, Victor Puertas, was arrested on March 5 and charged with domestic terrorism and was released from DeKalb County Jail after 90 days. But then once he was released from DeKalb County Jail, he was picked up by ICE. He is a foreign national but a resident. He's lived here for I believe something like a decade at this point. But he was taken by ICE and brought to Stewart County ICE detention facility. DeKalb County Jail, where he was held for those 90 days, is one of the worst jails in the state. And Stew-

Week of Solidarity, where solidarity events took place in home cities, and these sorts of events happened. I am not aware of any of them coming up. I do believe that after this Week of Action, there will be some sort of actual info tour by organizers here going around speaking about Cop City in cities around at least the southeast, if not further afield. But I am not aware of anything happening leading up to the Week of Action in that regard.

TFSR: Just to tie this up and talk again about ACPC, I recall in past conversations that I've had about the movement to Stop Cop City that the coverage from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* has been pretty terrible. I believe they have some connection to the Police Foundation, or am I wrong on that?

M: So the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is owned by Cox Media Group, which is owned by Cox Enterprises. And the chairman of Cox Enterprises is Alex C. Taylor, who is a Cox family heir, but he served as the head of fundraising for the Cop City project. Cox has donated several million dollars to the Cop City project itself. So the coverage that has happened in our paper of record, in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, hasn't been good by and large. That has changed over the last couple of months. There's a journalist named Riley Bunch who's taken over, essentially, the Cop City beat. And she's done more engagement and more critique and more challenge of the general narrative. So it is changing to some extent, the editorial board that runs the *AJC* is still producing pro-Cop City editorials at a rapid rate. It is definitely driven toward biased coverage of the Public Safety Training Center, or Cop City. But there are definitely journalists within the organization who are trying to do good work, are trying to actually engage in this project you would expect an outlet to do.

TFSR: It feels independent media projects often rise up because people aren't seeing the conversations they want to see in the mainstream media or legacy media or whatever around them. I wonder, as a member of ACPC, what impact have you seen from any shifts in narrative? Do you think that the change in direction of the *AJC* towards covering Cop City has been impacted by the journalism that y'all have been doing? Are there other areas, other content or topics, that you all have covered that you've seen a shift in conversations about in regard to?

M: I would certainly like to think that the coverage that we've done and the work that we've done has had an impact on the *AJC*'s editorial decisions. I have no evidence to that fact, but I would like to believe so. And to your point, ACPC definitely did come in the wake of a lack of journalistic engagement to this project. There was another publication here in Atlanta called *The Great Speckled Bird* that existed in the 60s and 70s that came in in very similar circumstances where, at that point

around the forest defense. Are you aware of the details of it, of any of the public events or where more information can be found, what days it's going to cross?

M: The dates will be June 24th-July 1st. There is a kickoff event on June 24th at 1pm. I do not believe the venue has been publicly announced. And then there will be another music festival on July 1st at the end of the week of action, and the venue has not been announced either. A lot of this Week of Action seems to be a lot quieter than past Weeks of Action. And we expect to find information in terms of what is happening and where it's happening closer to the event time. That information will be available on the various Defend the Forest social media accounts. There is a calendar on DefendTheAtlantaForest.org that I believe will be updated to include the events once they are made public.

TFSR: Considering the really heavy level of repression that people have been facing increasingly as the movement has gone on, is there much in the way of discussion from coordinators, organizers, or announcers of these events about ways that people can keep themselves safer while also attending and resisting?

M: I am aware that there are internal conversations about keeping community members and keeping other activists and organizers safe throughout the process. I'm sure there will be education that goes on during the Week of Action. That is actually typically... Historically that has been done: how to keep yourself safe, what to do when a police officer approaches you. Those sorts of conversations are ones that were had by the Solidarity Fund organizers who are arrested, and I don't know if they will be doing that this time around, but they do have other people volunteering in that cop watch organization who will do so. So the conversations are happening. I am sure that there will be some guidance given at the start of particular events about what they can expect. But of course, when you're dealing with police, you never really know if they're going to overreact or not. So there's a level of risk involved in any of these events, even the ones that may seem relatively germane because of the unpredictability of police.

TFSR: Well, I know in the past, there have been coordinated info tours (I don't know if that's a thing you've heard anything about.) in different places to hype up the week in advance, answer questions, and get people informed. Is that a thing that you've heard of? Or maybe people should just check out *Scenes from the Atlanta Forest* or other sites?

M: Yeah, that information would be on various websites. I know that that's something that's happened in the past, and organizers in various cities will talk about the Week of Action before it happens. Ahead of the last Week of Action, there was the

art County Detention Center is also pretty atrocious and constantly under attack by civil rights watchdog groups for its conditions. So he's continuing to suffer pretty awful conditions for attending a music festival. Other than that, there's another individual who is being held in a county north of Atlanta called Bartow County under charges of felony stalking and intimidation of a police officer for passing out flyers. And these flyers said "In your neighborhood, there's a killer," and named the Georgia State Police officers who killed Tortugueta. So they were passing those out in the neighborhood of this Georgia State Patrol Trooper, and the trooper called the local police and said that he wanted to press charges and that he felt threatened. So there were three individuals charged with that. One of them is still being held in jail for that. And the reason that they are still being held is that they took a reimbursement from an account that is linked to the Solidarity Fund under this umbrella network of nonprofits. Prosecutors used that reimbursement for camping equipment as a way to claim that this person was deeply involved with the Defend the Forest movement, and the judge did not grant them a bond condition.

TFSR: I understand that, because this is such a hot topic, and because there are a lot of right-wing trolls out there, I would imagine that a lot of people are wary of having their personal information put out on the internet, but are you aware of any places where people who do want support, who are still being held are facing charges, where one can find more information about them to try to help them out?

M: Yes, every defendant individually is asked whether they would like their name put out there for things like support. So that is handled by the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. The Solidarity Fund is continuing to operate, and the Jail Support Network is continuing to operate. Their social media accounts would be the best place to find that. They have posted about Victor Puertas and what Victor is looking for in terms of support and how to send messages. Charlie is the defendant in Bartow County. I know that they are also looking for contact and messages. And I believe the defendant who's in DeKalb County is also looking for that, but I am not sure, so I won't say their name. But all that information would be on the Atlanta Solidarity Fund's social networks, their Instagram account.

TFSR: That's super helpful. Earlier this month, we saw at least 15 hours of public comment at the City Council by Atlanta residents, overwhelmingly speaking against funding Cop City, before the City Council decided to vote for double the initial funding for Cop City that was initially requested. As you quoted \$90 million, of which \$1.3 million will be paid every year towards it for the next 30 years, besides a lump sum. But some City Council members claimed that institutions like the Atlanta Police Department are a part of their constituency and one of the groups that they felt responsible for. So deciding to approve the funding and increased funding for this proj-

ect was counterweighed by statements by institutions like the APD. Have you gotten a sense of response from the public to this vote?

M: Yeah, so the city of Atlanta is going to pay \$67 million total. We're going to pay \$30 million lump sum payment, and then it's \$1.2 million a year for 30 years for an extra \$36 million out of the alleged \$90 million total. And that's important because the Atlanta Police Foundation said that they were going to pay \$60 million of the \$90 million, and that is flipped. So the 15 hours of public comment was pretty enlightening for a lot of people. And what we saw, even leading up to that... Three weeks prior, there was another public comment session that was shorter, just under seven and a half hours. And after that people started to come out to subcommittee meetings, and they were talking about how they were activated by watching all these people come out and give public comment and basically just be ignored. So we are continuing to see that effect. And that's playing out now through the referendum effort where people are saying, "Okay, well, if City Council isn't going to listen to the people, then we are going to take matters into our own hands and do this referendum." A straight up or down vote on canceling the lease will potentially be on the November election ballot.

So you're seeing a lot of condemnation amongst the people. But the arguments that City Council has put forth, those who voted for the facility, I'm not really seeing anything other than a very small minority of people in favor of the facility accepting. People oppose the facility, and even people who are on the fence are still pretty shocked by the fact that you can have the largest in-person public comment session in at least modern history, if not all of Atlanta history, just be summarily ignored. And at this point, there's something like... Between the call-in public comment and all the in-person public comment on this last go-around, we're at something 48 hours of public comment. So essentially, two actual days of public comment, and a small minority of that was against. And I don't think you see that really anywhere else. If this was anything else other than this police training center, I don't think we would even be talking about going against that. But since we are talking about police, and we are talking about, in particular, the Atlanta Police Foundation, we are having a very different conversation where it seems like the public will is being ignored.

TFSR: So the remainder of that \$90 million then would be coming, I guess, from the Atlanta Police Foundation, which is backed by independent investors, companies like Waffle House, Home Depot, Nationwide Insurance, stuff like that, is that right?

M: Yeah, the last number I heard is that they were able to raise \$33.4 million in actual donations from corporations and other philanthropic funds like the Robert Woodruff Foundation. And then they also have a \$5 million new market tax credit that they're getting. So they're bringing in roughly \$38 million. The price of this

facility is going to be higher than \$90 million by the time everything is said and done. But right now, they've brought that \$38 million, and then they have a \$20 million construction loan that is being paid off, from what we understand, through the \$1.2 million yearly payments.

TFSR: At what point in the process is the actual construction of Cop City and destruction of the forest right there in the south commons?

M: We are unfortunately in the second phase of construction. So clearcutting is over, and we are moving into mass grading. Clearcutting is of course environmentally devastating, but mass grading is changing the contours of land permanently. So we are having a large impact on the ecological structure of the South River Forest at this point. They are anticipating starting actual construction in late August. Whether they're able to do so is going to depend on the referendum and potential injunctions or possible direct actions taken by actors down the line.

TFSR: Would injunctions be a separate process than the referendum? Or is that a part of the referendum, that once signatures have been collected, and it's put to the City Council, I guess, to review that information, would that automatically force a stop in the construction? Or would they be able to just stall it out and continue the process of building Cop City?

M: The organizers of the referendum are definitely going to seek injunctions. At this point, there was a prior court case on environmental grounds to overturn the land disturbance permit for Cop City. And when that was ongoing, that attorney also sought injunctive relief and was denied. So we can expect the Atlanta Police Foundation to fight any injunction. And for that environmental action injunction, the CEO Dave Wilkinson of the Atlanta Police Foundation said that he wanted construction to continue and that anyone could file for an injunction and it would essentially be insane to have to stop construction for any injunction filed against you or any action filed against you. So until a judge signs off on an injunction order, we could expect the Atlanta Police Foundation to continue construction. So with the referendum, there will likely be two injunctions. The first injunction they will seek when it looks like they will have enough signatures, so when they can reasonably argue in front of a judge that we are likely to succeed in our signature collection campaign. And that will hold construction until the end of the signature collecting window. If they can collect the number of signatures that they require, then they will seek another injunction to get injunctive relief all the way until the November 7 election.

TFSR: Okay, and I can see this being such a divisive topic that might have an impact on elected officials and how concerned they are about keeping their seats. You had mentioned that there's an upcoming Week of Action